

Claim 2 The stiffening system of claim 1 wherein there are a plurality of bands and truss members, and

wherein the bands are placed on top of the at least three [two] joists spaced apart from one another along the length of each joist.

Add claims 21-26.

SB B1 Claim <sup>13</sup>21 The stiffening system of claim <sup>12</sup>1 wherein central portions of the x-shaped braces can be removed to allow for an unobstructed passageway for duct work to extend between two of the at least three joists.

Claim <sup>14</sup>22 The stiffening system of claim <sup>8</sup>1 wherein central portions of the x-shaped braces can be removed to allow for an unobstructed passageway for duct work to extend between two of the at least three joists.

Claim <sup>15</sup>23 The stiffening system of claim <sup>11</sup>1 wherein central portions of the x-shaped braces can be removed to allow for an unobstructed passageway for duct work to extend between two of the at least three joists.

Claim <sup>16</sup>24 The stiffening system of claim <sup>13</sup>21 wherein the central portions of the x-shaped braces have fracture zones to allow for knocking out the center of the x-shaped braces to provide the unobstructed passageway.

Claim <sup>17</sup>25 The stiffening system of claim <sup>14</sup>22 wherein the central portions of the x-shaped braces have fracture zones to allow for knocking out the center of the x-shaped braces to provide the unobstructed passageway.

Claim <sup>18</sup>26 The stiffening system of claim <sup>15</sup>23 wherein the central portions of the x-shaped braces have fracture zones to allow for knocking out the center of the x-shaped braces to provide the unobstructed passageway.

#### REMARKS

The drawing criticism for the drawing's filed December 27, 2000 is not understood since such was corrected by the submission of formal drawings on March 5, 2001. Clarification is requested.

Reconsideration of the rejection of claims 1-20 as anticipated by Kovar ('647) under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) is requested. Claim 1 has been amended to indicate that a system is provided for aligning and separating at least three joists with a single band extending atop the at least three joists and with at least two truss members attached to the band with each truss member extending